Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.
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EDITORIAL

As I write this editorial we are one week into the first national postal strike since 1971, with no end in sight. Consequently I have no idea when you will be reading this, despite the October date.

The Treasurer of the Spanish Main, Brian Moorhouse, has for administrative reasons, decided that subscriptions to the Spanish Main and its Groups should be calendar rather than seasonal. Accordingly your subscription will become renewable on January 1 rather than September 1, but please do not let this deter you from remitting well in advance!

Our subscription is kept as low as possible, and with no income during the latter part of this year, our reserves can only fund one issue, this one, which is why it is dated October. The next issue will appear in January, and quarterly after that.

The Spanish Main auction will be held on Saturday November 26, at the Victory Services Club, and catalogues for the sale should be in the post around the middle of October.

The final meeting this year is the combined Spanish Main Cup and AGM to be held on Saturday December 10. Entry forms are available from Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, Peterborough, PE3 8TQ, England. Exhibits from overseas members are welcome, and full instructions for posting your exhibit will be sent to you upon receipt of your entry form.

Mike Birks

SPANISH MAIN Annual subscription £5 (UK), £6 (Europe), $15 (elsewhere) The subscription includes four copies of Mainsheet, and also private treaty lists and auction catalogues.

Secretary: Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, PETERBOROUGH PE3 8TQ, England.

The society also runs two specialised groups, the Central American and the Chile groups. The subscription to each group is £3 (UK) or $7 elsewhere, to Spanish Main members, or $10 to non-members (Overseas subscriptions only). This includes four copies of the respective Newsletter.

COSTA RICA - THE LARGE NUMERAL OVERPRINTED ISSUE OF 1881/1882

by RICHARD H SAUNDRY

At a recent meeting of the Spanish Main there was considerable discussion as to why the large numeral overprint issues of 1881/1882 (SG 6-9; Scott 7-10) on the first issues of Costa Rica should have been made. It was widely accepted by most members present that the reason such stamps were required was that at that time Costa Rica changed from the old Spanish currency of 8 reales = 1 peso to the decimal system of 100 centavos = 1 peso. I believed that I had read somewhere that this was not the case and decided to check back through what literature I had to verify the truth or falseness of the explanation that decimalisation was the reason for the overprinted stamps. I conclude on the basis of what follows that (1) adoption of decimalisation was not the reason that the overprinted issue was made and (2) low value adhesives were required at short notice to be able to prepay newly adopted lower postal rates.

Decimalisation in Costa Rica

The first issues of Costa Rica appeared in 1863, were printed and supplied by the American Bank Note Company, New York, and served as the only adhesives for Costa Rica for the best part of twenty years. During this period as stocks of certain values ran low additional printings were made. As late as 1875 a new printing was made from a new plate of the ½ real blue value. It is this long period of use that confuses collectors of Costa Rica who conclude that for this whole period Costa Rica retained the old Spanish-style currency. However this is not true.

Subsequent to ordering the first stamps, but before they were delivered, a decision was made to decimalise. This was established by Presidential decree on 24 November 1863, and the decimal system adopted on 1 January 1864. Until that time postal rates (Decree No. 2, 9 September 1862) were expressed in reales and pesos so that the domestic letter rate was ½ real per ounce, plus 4 reales for registration; Foreign (Central America) rate was 2 reales per ½ ounce, with paquetes (parcels?) at 3 reales per pound and 8 reales registration; and Foreign (non Central American) rates at 4 reales per ½ ounce, paquetes 6 reales per pound and 12 reales registration. How then was it possible to reconcile the decimal system with the old Spanish-style stamps? The values of the four stamps were ½r, 2r, 4r and 1 peso. The top three values presented no problems as they were now equal to 25 centavos, 50 centavos and the one peso stayed the same. The ½ real blue was now theoretically worth 6¼ centavos, so therefore an adjustment had to be made. The nearest coin of the realm was 5 centavos so it was expedient to convert ½ real to 5 centavos. This was formally adopted when new postal rates were published (Decree XV, 9 June 1866, Article 1).

The single domestic letter rate was set at 5 centavos, double rate at 10 centavos, triple rate at 15 centavos etc.. For parcels (paquetes) the new rate was 20 centavos per ounce. Furthermore it was specifically stated 'consequently the blue stamps (sic. ½ reale blue) notwithstanding their legend, will be sold at the rate of 5 centavos each'. The single foreign letter rate (to USA) was set at 25 centavos for ½ ounce, and 25 centavos each additional ¼ ounce.

The fact that the ½ real stamp was now worth only 5 centavos is beautifully exemplified by a cover to the USA dated 25 March 1868 bearing five of the blue ½ real stamps to prepay the 25 centavos rate, which if the old Spanish-style currency system was still in operation could have been satisfied with only four of the blue stamps (4 x ½ real = 2 reales = 25 centavos). The fact that decimalisation in Costa Rica occured before 1881/1882 is unquestionably clear.

The Reason For the Large Numeral Surcharges of 1881/2

There is no formal decree authorising the overprinting (surcharging) of the 1 real stamps and their authenticity has been questioned. There is however indirect evidence that the 1 centavo and 2 centavos overprinted stamps are in fact genuine issues. In a letter from A M G Escalante, Director General of Posts in Costa Rica to Cecil Sharpe, the British Consul, dated 7 August 1883 in which were described all the Costa Rican issues, these two overprinted stamps were mentioned along with the later UPU overprinted issues of 1883 (cited in Le Timbre Post, vol 21, No 251, November 1883, p88, cited in turn by Hector Mena (1987)). Since there are no authorising decrees we can only infer from the then current philatelic press (The Philatelic Record, December 1882) their dates of issue which are January 1881 for the large figure 2 centavos overprinted issue, and September/October 1882 for the 1 centavo overprinted value. The authenticity of the 5 centavos stamp is questionable but if it was ever issued, late 1882 is the most likely date.

The justification of the issue (G Noriega, 1957) probably lies in the decree of 16 December 1880 which revised the postal rates and 'simple letters, circulars and commercial notices (open) which circulate within the locality of origin shall pay the rate of two centavos'. Also from 1 March 1881 a 2 centavos rate for each 50g printed matter for residence delivery had to be prepaid. There was, therefore, a clear postal need for a 2 centavos stamp.

The justification for the 1 centavo large numeral overprinted stamp seems to lie with a law of unknown date (c1881) that decreed that the 1 centavo rate of 1866 for newspapers addressed to a post office or box, to be collected by the addressee, formerly prepaid but not requiring an affixed stamp, would now require a stamp.

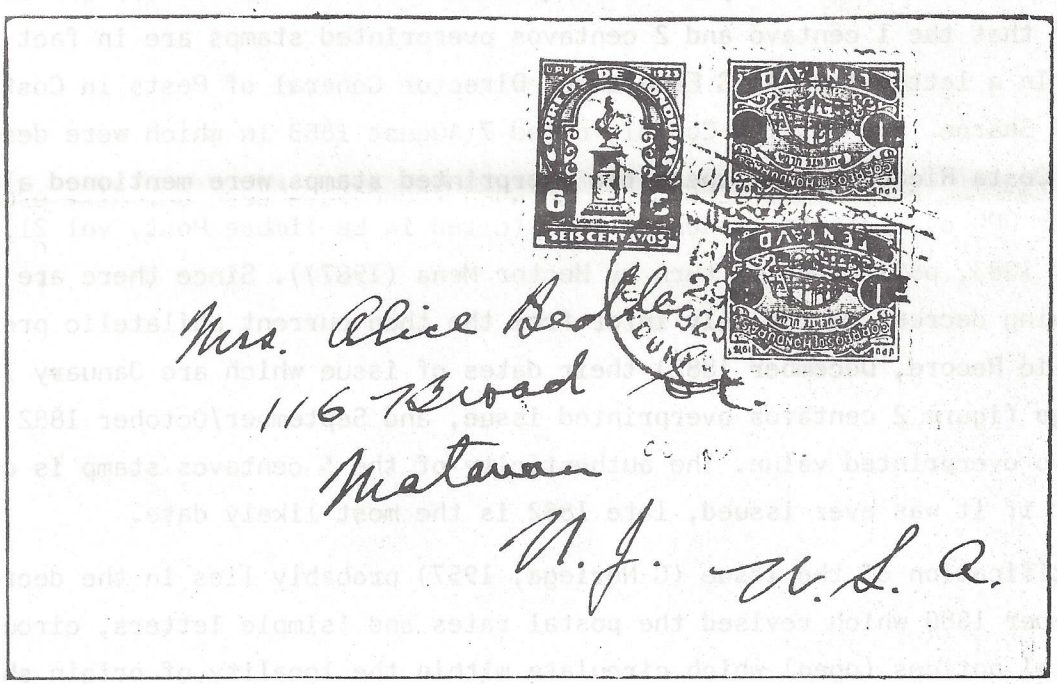
There is thus a reasonable case to be made for both the 1 centavo and the 2 centavos overprinted stamps.

Why the 5 centavos overprints? The ½ real was the common stamp overprinted for all three new values. Perhaps for clarity it was decided late in 1882 to distinguish the 5 centavos stamp. Early in 1883 we have the UPU overprinted issue thus making the 5 centavos large numeral overprinted stamp obsolete. With such a short period of use it is not surprising that no cover with the 5 centavos/½ real stamp is extant.

Literature read or cited:

Reprint of 'First Postage Stamps of Costa Rica', R J Mechin and Alex A Cohen. Collectors Club Philatelist Vol XXVII No.3. Reprinted in Oxcart Vols 4-10.
H Mena, Oxcart Vol.108 (1987) p71. A Cohen, Oxcart Vol.40 (1970) p79.
J W Sauber, 'The 1881-82 Overprints, genuine and Counterfeit, part 2", Oxcart Vol.100 (1985) pp98-120.
G Noriega, 'Estudio sobre las Primeras Sobrecargas de Costa Rica' Filatelia Costarricense Vol.25 (1957) pp1-6.
Alfredo Moya Costa Rica Filatelica Nos. 6, 7 & 8 (March, July and October 1934).

CAVEAT EMPTOR



We have been sent a photocopy of a cover franked with a pair of faked overprints to give the appearance of Scott C10a pair used on cover. Although most serious Honduras collectors would not buy such a cover without having it first expertised we thought it best to reproduce it here, to be on the safe side.

The purchaser, identifying it as a fake, returned the cover to the supplier, and so it is possible it may reappear on the philatelic market. Items cannot be marked 'bogus' or 'fake' in the US without the express consent of the owner, and so it is quite possible for a disreputable dealer to repeatedly offer such an item until an unsuspecting buyer is found.

Illustration by courtesy of Leo Malz.

NICARAGUA: SOME UNADOPTED ESSAYS by KILIAN NATHAN

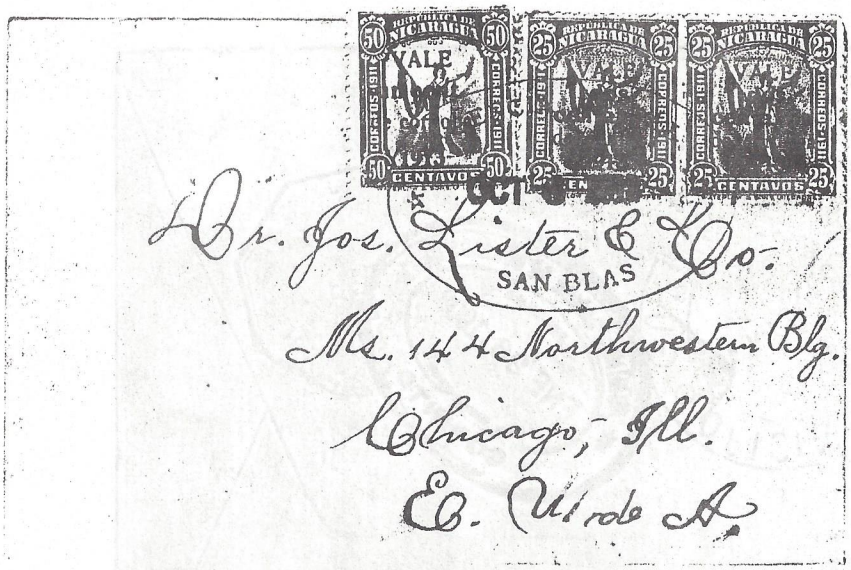
A recent acquisition of two sets of essays has raised a number of questions I hope readers will be able to answer. Both sets consist of nine identical designs, with just the value changed, and neither set was actually issued. The essays were lithographed around 1935 I think, to honour Emanuel Mongalo. Emanuel Mongalo y Rubio was a poet and teacher in Rivas who was considered a hero for his part in the defeat of William Walker at Rivas on 29 June 1855.

½c dark green
1c orange yellow
2c red
3c dark blue
4c violet brown
5c violet
6c bistre
7c bluish black
10c light blue

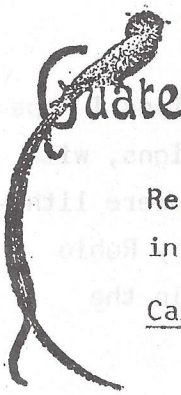
2c violet red
5c violet brown
8c dark green
10c violet
15c dark blue
20c red
25c violet brown
30c violet grey
35c light green

Perhaps someone could enlighted me as to when the essays were actually produced, and by whom they were designed and printed. Further background regarding the activities of Emanuel Mongalo would also be welcome. Said to be 'ex Mathews'?

WHERE IS SAN BLAS?



Another appeal for information - where is San Blas? It must be a fairly small town or village in view of the scarcity of this cancellation. It may well be close to Granda in view of the backstamps, but a search of several maps has not disclosed its location. Can any reader help?

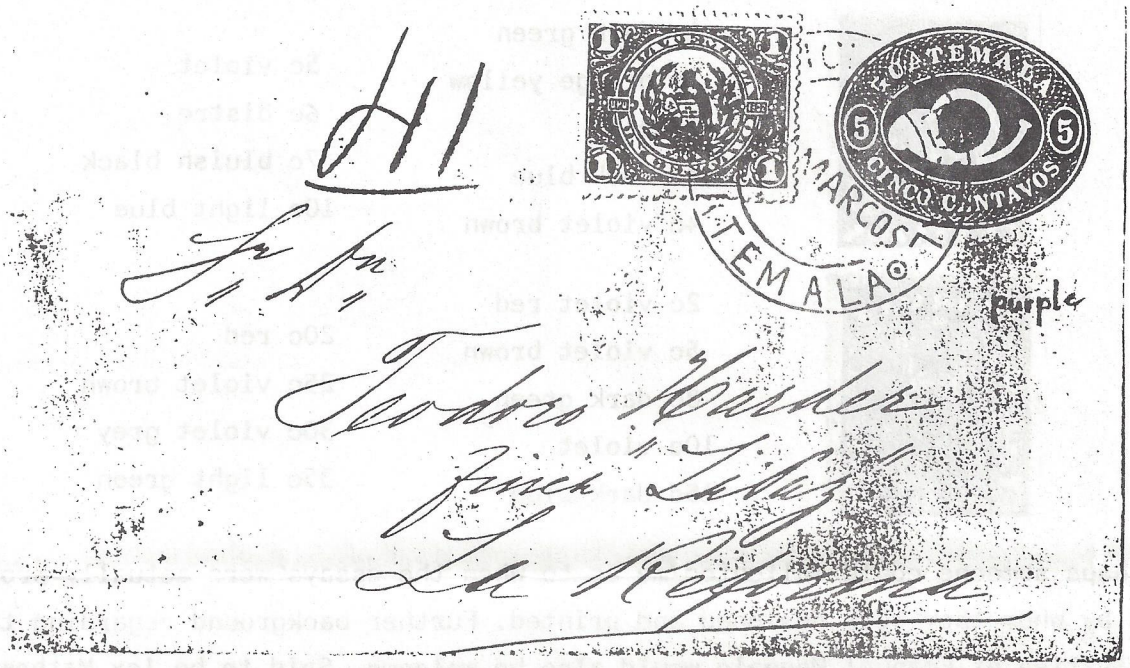


THE LARGE UNDATED TOWN MARKING OF SAN MARCOS

by MARK SPYCHER

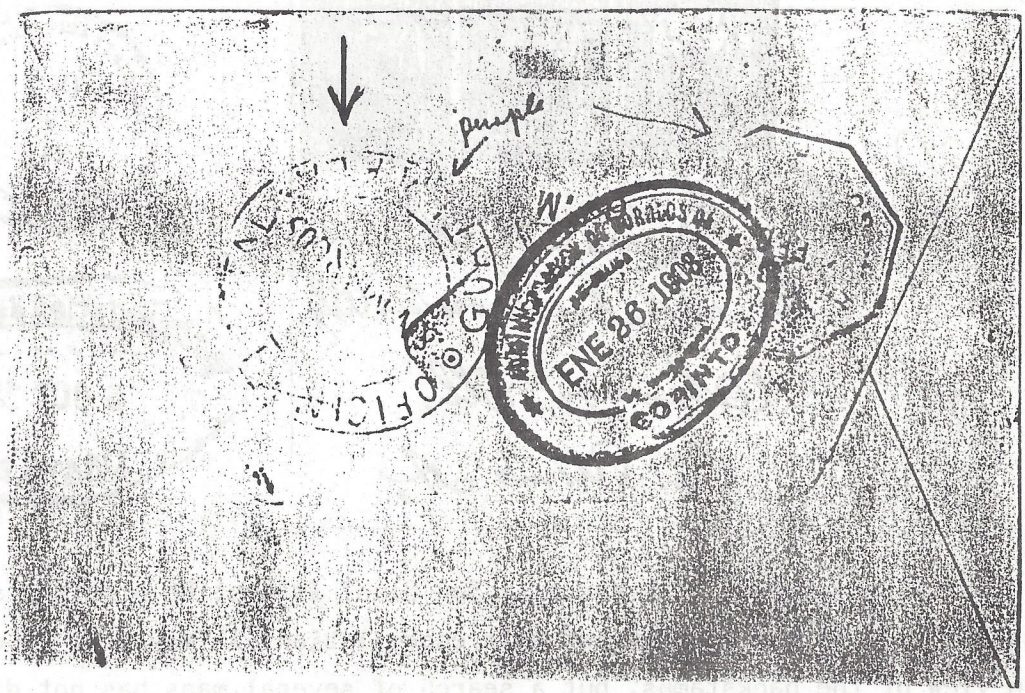
Re Mrs Cecile Gruson's article in CANL 32 of June 1988, it might be of interest to show the different usages of this cancellation.

Cancelling the stamps



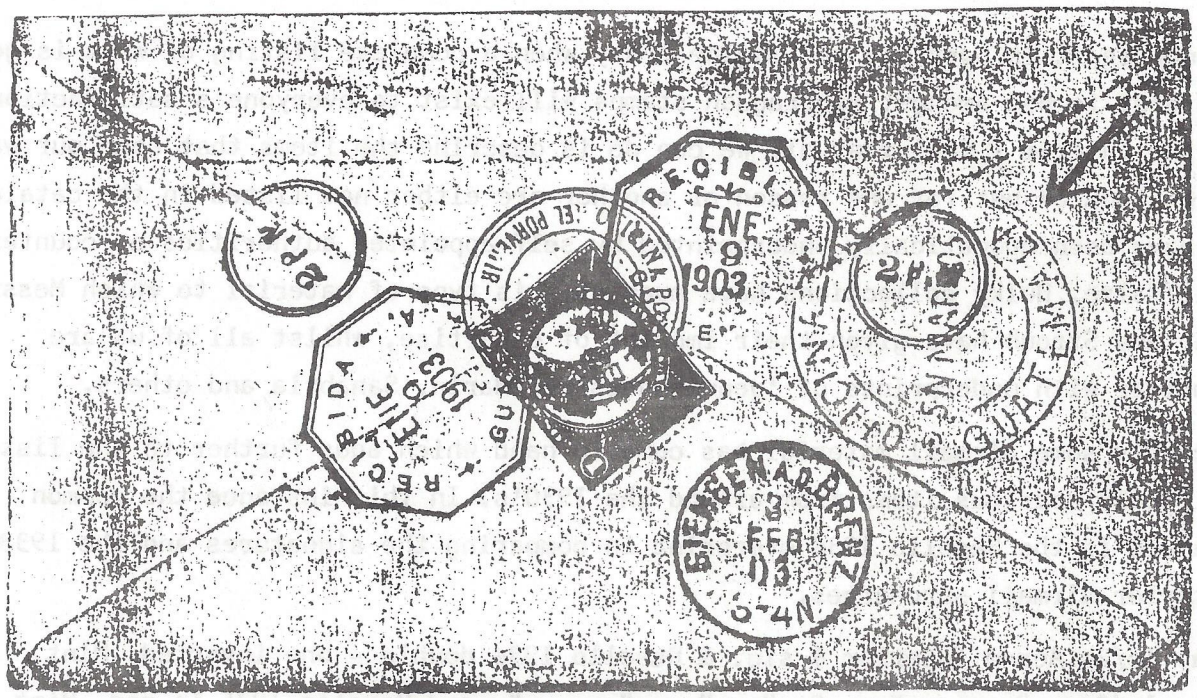
Cover of December 2, 1902 from San Marcos to La Reforma

As an arrival mark



Cover from Momotombo January 23, 1903 via Corinto, and Guatemala City to San Marcos.

As a transit mark

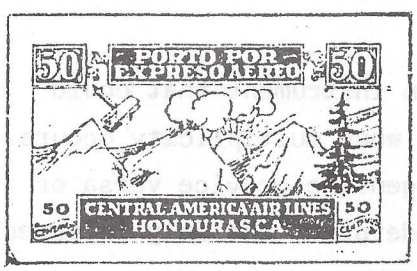


Cover from El Porvenir January 3, 1903 via San Marcos and Guatemala City to Germany.

I agree with Mrs Gruson's statement that in this case the San Marcos marking was used sporadically for a relatively short period on account of a temporary lack of other cancelling devices.

Are other covers known?

HONDURAS



The stamp illustrated (left) was purchased in a recent cinderella sale by Roger Allan. He says that he has never seen this stamp before and would welcome any information from members.

NICARAGUA Derek Pocock writes regarding the rare surcharge SG651, ScottC10.

He writes: 'SG651, the green surcharge 15c on 25c provisional airmail of June 7, 1931 - the rare brown-purple (Scott black-brown). Is the catalogue illustration correct for this value or was the simpler 1931/¢ 0.15 of 21st June, normally seen in blue used on this stamp? A recent purchase included this stamp, and it may well be that SG651 was surcharged with T119, not T117 as were SG652-655. It may also be true that this stamp is bogus - not an unusual occurrance in this area.'

Does anyone have a copy of SG651, Scott C10, and would care to comment?

COUNTERFEITS OF NICARAGUA by Derek Pocock

I suppose it is possible to imagine a day when a complete listing of what is good and what is bad amongst Nicaraguan stamps will exist to everyone's satisfaction. In the interim I feel that all we can do is describe the items that come our way which look OK but for one reason or another are either not listed in the catalogues or have been dogmatically underprinted by self-appointed authorities as counterfeit/false. Bulky collections have much of this type of material to which Messrs Cone and Stroub have given their imprint of expertise, whilst all of us are familiar with underprints of 'genuineness' by Marin, Sanabria and others.

Recently some airmail material has come to hand which adds further to the list of allegedly spurious items from around the 1930's. In this instance the common feature is the Resello 1936 overprint in comparing the signatures and the 1933 interior airmail surcharges.

1a. 1c/2c Aereo Interior & sig. & Resello 1936 double - one inverted. Mint.
2a. 1c/2c " " " " " " " and Resello 1935 in red. Mint.
b. 2c/3c as above
c. 4c/5c as above
3a. 1c/2c Aereo Interior & sig. & Resello 1936 double & Resello 1935 in red. Mint
b. 2c/3c as above

all except 3a have 'Counterfeit' underprint as used by R N Cone.

There is obviously a relationship of the above to SG885-7 viz the 1933 surcharges with signature and Resello 1936 overprints. 1a would be SG885, but only the 2c/3c is alleged by Gibbons to have the Resello 1936 double with one inverted, not the 1c/2c. For the rest of the above, the presence of the 1935 Resello appears genuine like the other three overprints on these stamps.

Scientifically we could all use in this hobby of ours an instrument that could determine the sequence of overprinting (or postmarking) when multiplicity occurs. Here with up to four it would be nice to show false on genuine or vice versa or even genuine on genuine, thus making the counterfeit underprint the only incorrect feature!

Does SG0704 (or any other of the 1932 official set) genuinely exist with the signature overprint of 1933. I have a mint example of this value - the 50c green - and both the signature and the official overprint appear genuine. Perhaps members could report if they have copies of this or any other value from that set.

Comments on any of the above points raised here, or indeed any other questionable items you may have, would be welcomed - Ed.